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Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits

Fire for a Weekend:

An Experience of the
Spiritual Exercises

John R. Shepherd, S.J.

with

Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

22/3 May 1990

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THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence the Studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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For your information . . .

What do you do when you question or puzzle over or disagree with or seek clarification of all or part of an issue of *Studies*? We hope that you write or phone us. Your comments are important to us. The "us" in question are the author of a particular essay and, more generally, the members of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, the nine members chosen in rotation and the secretary and myself as chairman of the Seminar and editor of *Studies*. That importance is one of the reasons for the "Letters to the Editor" section, started some two years ago. As a general policy *Studies* asks that such letters be no longer than about 750 words, about the length of three double-spaced typewritten pages. Once in a while an article might prompt a longer response. Such is the case with our most recent "Jesuit Spirituality from a Process Perspective" by Joseph Bracken. It brought the lengthy response in this issue by Avery Dulles followed by further comments by Father Bracken. I am very grateful to both of them, and I think your sentiments will be the same, for the depth, the frankness, the courtesy, the interest of their exchange of views.

Come, do the same. As an encouragement for your own letters, the original notice about such letters appears here again.

This current issue of *Studies*, "Fire for a Weekend," is a contrast to the March issue. Together, the two of them exemplify the mixture of theory and practice, speculation and narrative that, we hope, characterizes this journal. The present essay is the product of reflections on a long and productive apostolate of giving retreats. John Shepherd has graced that work, especially the work of the preached weekend retreat, with great effect for so many years and for so many people. In this thoughtful and very personal essay, he encourages all of us to share at times in this work as a personal expression of our Jesuit heritage of the Spiritual Exercises. But also, he does two other things. First, quite clearly he shows how dear to his heart this apostolate has been. Secondly, albeit unconsciously, he witnesses to how fruitful for his retreatants his own example of the interrelationship of work and prayer has been. In the course of preparing a first revision of his original article, John worked with Paul Soukup, formerly a member of the Seminar. Then, during an illness which John has recently suffered, Paul

very generously took on additional work on the article, so that the authors' credit is plural and the preposition "with" that joins their names reflects their mutual work.

Fifteen provocative long-weekend meetings on imaginative subjects of mutual concern over the course of three years during the membership term of a seminar participant help to forge a strong bond of friendship. So it is regularly a bittersweet occasion when another group of members completes that term. The departing members are surely happy to regain those weekends for other pursuits, but they will also surely miss and be missed by their remaining confreres. This year we say goodbye and thanks to four such members: John Coleman of JSTB, Robert Doran of Regis/Toronto, Frank Houdek of JSTB, and Michael O'Sullivan of Loyola Marymount. Fear not, however, in addition to all the work they did as members of the editorial board of *Studies*, their own essays will appear as future issues of *Studies*.

And what about the next issue? I shall tell you then about the backgrounds of our four new members: John Breslin, John Donahue, John Foley, and Gerard Stockhausen. And you will have the opportunity to read Michael O'Sullivan's essay, "Trust Your Feelings, But Use Your Head: Discernment and the Psychology of Decision Making." You might even want to respond to it by a letter to the editor.

John W. Padberg, S.J.
Editor

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Fire for a Weekend

An Experience of the Spiritual Exercises

INTRODUCTION

Over thirty years ago I preached my first retreat. Since then I have lost count of how many times I have preached and later directed the Spiritual Exercises, in full and in a condensed form. Essentially the experience has been the same, with more or less success; yet, surprisingly, over the years each retreat has been different. One particular kind of retreat has been most often repeated several times a year. This is the weekend, three-day, two-and-a-half-day, sometimes even two-day retreat experience, usually in some Jesuit retreat house. It is on this kind of retreat that the present essay concentrates.

Although I have directed the full thirty-day Exercises and three times experienced them myself and although I have even more often either directed or preached eight- and six-day retreats to men or women religious and occasionally to mixed groups, I feel it will be more of interest and help to some potential weekend-retreat director to confine my observations to the three-day retreat. I have had longer experience than most American Jesuits in preaching weekend retreats; from this, the experience I most want to share is the conviction that through such an opportunity many others can have the same deep satisfaction as I have had.

It used to be a kindly put-down that retreat centers catered to saving the already saved. Definitely, the retreat apostolate is not

simply preaching to the saved. Recently a younger Jesuit came by invitation to observe a weekend retreat. His own apostolate was to the alienated and unchurched. He was searching in various ways to seek out and invite back the lost sheep of Israel. It seems that he was discouraged by the small success he had had in his work, feeling the burden and antipathy throughout the marketplace where he had sought to serve.

The weekend he had accepted was an ordinary weekend at the retreat house. It was a men's retreat numbering about eighty men. The style and atmosphere had been set. Only the talks, given several times a day, along with the Liturgy, could be judged as more contemporary. Silence was kept except during evening recreation, although a few skipped this relaxation and remained quiet the entire two and a half days.

All the young Jesuit was asked to do was to be visible and available for consultation or confessions. At the end, moved by the grace of this ordinary weekend, he remarked, "In this one weekend I have had more reconciliations from estranged Catholics than I've experienced in my entire search outside."

This is typical week after week in the retreat experience of both men and women. Experiencing these weekend encounters soon produces evidence that the Spirit has called a large percentage of retreatants, whether regular attendants or first-timers, to genuine growth in the spiritual way or often, even more radically, to a complete change of heart.

This is what makes each weekend event both exciting and satisfying. I feel I become both an ear and a heart for the work of the Spirit, to listen and to touch another person who is ready to surrender to God. Who it will be I can never guess, but the touch of conversion happens week after week.

Although in this essay I am speaking in particular of adaptations of the Spiritual Exercises, my experience has also been in other retreat settings, both formal and informal. There are many other kinds of retreat approaches which are offered throughout the

country, and I have participated in many of them, sometimes as a member of a team, and other times as guest director for a specialized group. These include Marriage Encounter, retreats for alcoholics or co-dependents, and youth renewal weekends. I know the different graces that arise. All are valid; but I must say, in general, that on the average weekend at a silent retreat given over to more reflective sessions and private prayerfulness, the number of profound conversions and particularly fruitful confessions is always high.

And so, as mentioned at the beginning, for clarity I would like to confine my reflections in this issue of *Studies* to my personal story of learning more and more the unique value of the three-day retreat experience.

GROWING UP WITH THE EXERCISES

These many years of either constantly leading others or being directed myself in the way of the Spiritual Exercises have been an ongoing discovery of the interior design and power of the Exercises. However, though it may be a personal prejudice, I feel that the common experience of many preached retreats during ten or more years of Jesuit formation left me and others with unspoken and troubling questions.

The official documents of the Society, renewed from time to time by various general congregations, all praise the power of the Exercises to transform lives. Why, then, did I feel so little interior power? In my own experience it always seemed there was a great abyss between my personal experience and the recorded experience of the saints. Initially, I accepted the distance. A young American, college-trained, very much a product of the shallow times, I judged I was not saintly material.

However, I did have ambitions. I wanted to be a good teacher. It was part of my adolescent fantasy life. I used to evaluate my teachers, thinking how I could do a better job than they in making the subject clearer. When I did encounter great teaching, I literally

sat at the teacher's feet and enthusiastically joined in class participation, simply because inspiration was evident in that classroom.

This was the kind of teacher I wanted to be. So when I learned that Jesuits also preached retreats or, as we said, "gave the Exercises," I wanted somehow to make that experience as vital as the brightest classroom event.

This was for me both a strong motive to keep searching the text of the Spiritual Exercises for enlightenment and also, without my knowing it in the beginning years, my major mistake. My mistake was to equate "giving the Spiritual Exercises" to "teaching the Spiritual Exercises." This mistaken attitude had grown slowly through the years, particularly during philosophy and theology.

For instance, several of us scholastics would go for long walks once a month to discuss one of the meditations in order to better understand its meaning. The concise text of St. Ignatius was not a problem. It actually offered a challenge to our inquiry. But what was the meaning for us today? I needed to know. Elsewhere, I read about seminars and international meetings on the Exercises which produced some fascinating insights and sometimes, as might be expected among Jesuits, strong divisions. All the time I kept as an intellectual hobby a collection of these clarifications on the various points or rules which St. Ignatius wrote. I even did my thesis during theology on the internal dynamics of the points in the meditation on the Three Kinds of Sins, offered during the First Week of the Exercises.

Through the years and through retreat after retreat, either one or other point or rule or technique or insight made some Ignatian statement clearer. I tried over and over to adapt each of these illuminations in my own preparation to preach the Exercises.

This was my mistake, as I said, making achieving clarity my major thrust. I know clarity can be a great gift in any teaching experience, but it is not the primary point in spiritual exercising. Exercising spiritually is more than thinking about spiritual values.

Spiritual exercises involve mind, emotions, and the very center of the soul.

While this may seem perfectly evident at the present time, it was not evident in the style of presentation of the Exercises that I grew up with during formation years. At the end of community retreats, I shared approval of the retreat master for his stories, his humor, and, from time to time, his scholarship. Seldom did I wax enthusiastic over the "experience." Seldom did I hear anyone else express any interior dispositions.

My response during such a retreat was nearly always dutiful. I put in the time required; and, even when I passed beyond having the Exercises preached to me, my private retreats stayed primarily on the intellectual level. Years of making my yearly retreats produced, I am sure, a kind of spiritual discipline. However, unanswered—even unasked—was the question: **Where was the fire of mighty desire?** Why was I always more or less satisfied with renewed contentment for living the hidden life? Perhaps the age for saintly deeds in the manner of our founding fathers had passed long ago. My spiritual energy seemed channeled into endurance for long years in the "long black line." I felt that the boundaries within which I might make retreat resolutions was the burden of a daily cross within the works of the province.

Little did I suspect the upheaval that was coming during the post-Vatican II years. The explosion in both philosophy and theology had strong effects on the practice of what we liked to term "the common life." In that regard more and more emphasis came to be placed on individual, personal responsibility for spiritual growth. The personally directed retreat seemed a rediscovery of the earlier Ignatian approach and a key element in maintaining stability within the Society.

For years, then, I sought different directors. The sum total of these kinds of directed retreats was for me another enriching and, at times, puzzling experience. If I had fourteen directed retreats, I also experienced fourteen different approaches to the Exercises.

Among these approaches there has been the use of highly and ordered biblical passages adapted to the main themes of the Four Weeks in the Exercises. Another approach has been the almost non-directive "pick and choose" where the spirit of the moment might lead. Each retreat had the advantage of personal contact and review, but not always a review of the motions of the Spirit, not always a review of the light or particularly the dark within. The style of discernment varied from director to director year after year.

I am grateful for the varied approaches in all these retreats, and I feel they have made me more effective in my own apostolate as a retreat director. Moreover, the very length of time involved in making annual retreats through the years, as well as my involvement in the changing styles of presenting the retreat meditations, has taught me varied approaches which I think are worth sharing. I feel like the householder who had a treasure chest containing things both old and new.

Through the years both some of the old and some of the new insights seem to have continuing effectiveness. I believe I can use these experiences from past retreats and now bring a fresher approach to the particular experience of a preached three-day retreat.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Here is my chief premise in this essay. **The material shared in a preached retreat must be the fruit of the speaker's own prayed experience.** It may seem so obvious, but in my experience it is frequently overlooked. The material shared in a preached retreat is not just points to be made clear. The points are not necessarily to be clothed in technical virtuosity, or even given with scholarly apparatus. Even a great collection of stories and examples does not make a good Ignatian retreat. The retreat director/preacher's own believing Ignatius's vision is the key to opening up the retreat listener. This is true for either a directed "one to one" experience or a group experience for a weekend or longer. Nearly always the per-

sonal conviction of the retreat master will be the channel for the graces of the Exercises.

The leap in faith in any dimension says "I will" from the heart, not from the head. Symbols are powerful. I submit that it is the inner call to holiness in service, symbolized by either scriptural or Ignatian figures, that really moves the retreatant. These signs or even a single sign actually moves to an active choice: the call of the King—who is Jesus—really sounds within. The potter—who is the Lord—forms His own, clay feet included. The vine really infuses its branches. The fire really ignites, and what does He will but that it be enkindled?

The retreat master can channel these possibilities. A group retreat allows a retreat director to say something of this nature which might be too personal in an individual session. Just as good books which are not written specifically for any particular individual still touch by the grace of the Spirit far beyond their printed message, so frequently the general meditations of Ignatius can do the same. How? one may ask, when there is so much more ground to cover in eight days: the First Week, the Kingdom, the Two Standards, prayer, dryness, plus rules to discern, eat, and distribute talents. A heavy load to choose from and a temptation to spend too much time intellectualizing.

However, the answer to the question of where the fire is in a retreat comes from Ignatius himself. **The fire is within what he calls the colloquy.** The colloquy is expected to be the prayer of the heart. The presentation of the Ignatian ideas will always be different if they are shaped with the expressions of the colloquy kept in mind.

The point to emphasize is that whatever material is presented needs to be designed to lead to prayer. Spontaneity is encouraged. In going through various hours of the Exercises, one is led to be spontaneously grateful, repentant, confused, or peaceful. The heart speaks to His heart, but the heart alone gives the fuller explanation

to the head. The style of praying is less important than the will to pray.

To extend this point further, let me say that the spoken, preached retreat should be so constructed that the intellectual content should help lead not so much to more reflection—the retreat master's ideas becoming the ideas of the retreatant through some kind of osmosis—but rather it should lead much more to a willingness on the part of the retreatant to fill the time left after the presentation with spontaneous prayer—even if that be a centering form of prayer. In fact, if the presentation has been unusually rich, the prayer of quiet and simple regard may be all that is possible.

My conviction is that this possibility should also be part of the presentation. The retreat master needs to share the Exercises as preparation for prayer far more than as any form of spiritual lectures. The points themselves are part of the creatures mentioned in the Foundation. As a retreat master, I use or set aside, choose and direct, particular Ignatian points insofar as they lead this particular group to private prayer.

I feel strongly that there is present an inbuilt dynamism whereby the Holy Spirit shapes and transforms both the retreatants and the director. Always the same and never the same are the weekends. Always in need and never unaffected come all different types to the retreat, men or women, either separately or as couples, or in specialized groupings. The makeup of each group always produces some persons in need of being healed, enlightened, and made spiritually whole.

Even though my own approach has improved and changed through the years, I have always experienced in the weekend retreats that the Spirit is more than the sum total of my words. Beyond any automatic response, there is the luminous experience of individual grace. But also there were my beginning experiences and sometimes the hard lessons that I learned from ill-chosen examples, such as an unconscious racist remark or perhaps a bit of tasteless humor which was roundly and rigidly criticized. These were pain-

ful learning experiences, but they never really impeded the work of conversion. I did improve in style and presentation through the years. I feel that ongoing experience in spiritual and personal contact made me a more sensitive, a better director. For this I am most grateful.

Just as in teaching so also in retreat directing, I had to grow. Rather than stagnate by saying the same thing each weekend, I learned to prepare more effectively by wide background reading and above all, by praying with the retreatants before and after each presentation. By allowing the Exercises to be prayerful in the presentation, I found an entirely new way to light an enthusiastic and lasting fire. Beyond the simply intellectual approach, such as might be used in a lecture, I found Ignatius led through the head all the way to the heart.

These later years in this apostolate have been filled with gratitude for all that has passed in countless retreats. The Spirit always was at work in the retreatants; but I did not realize that the Spirit was also working on my own way of proceeding as I shared—preached—the Exercises of St. Ignatius. To discover this in retreats preached to groups has been a gift of God to me. I am grateful for the gift, and so would like to share some practical applications that I feel are useful.

LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to the general truths about the Exercises that I learned through the years, a number of unique insights and applications emerged specific to the three-day adaptation, commonly called a weekend retreat.

The Participants

First I learned about the quality of uniqueness of those who were making such a retreat. Even though there is some kind of screening of participants which comes through selective grouping by professions or, at times, by circumstances which bring together the grieving, the divorced, or, particularly, the addicted, nonetheless, the groups always seem to include those with unique and immediate needs. Their stories emerge in private counseling, in the anonymity of the confessional, or sometimes in a written question. Sometimes a retreatant can break open a deep-seated need which has long been ignored. At times, the moment to trust a hurt to healing through the prayer experience of the retreat touches and moves individuals in great depth. In fact, if no recognizable and shared moment of grace occurs after the midway point of the retreat, I begin to examine my approach and definitely bring the group to prayer, especially at Mass.

Weekend after weekend there are real miracles of grace. The only wonder is that there is some mysterious sense of divine humor which sometimes brings about a conversion in the oddest places or at the very last moments. One retreat preacher once observed to me that retreatants come, brought by providential circumstances, when they are ready for more honesty either with themselves or with God. For some this may mean simply to make a more thorough confession. For others the retreat provides time to face a decision with deep moral implications.

It has been a fairly common experience that only after a number of retreats does the social dimension of the Gospel make an impact. Growth is not limited to the professional religious person. Many Catholics, both nominal and truly committed, grow slowly, even painfully, to accept some social teaching of the Church only after numerous retreats. It takes time, sometimes as long as ten years, for some retreatants to translate private spirituality—Jesus and I—to more selfless service of one's neighbor. Christian ethics makes a slow entrance into the total personality. I am convinced,

however, that the spiritual conversion expressed so many times during a weekend retreat is a solid experience. It may be a first-time insight or it may be a return to faithful practice after years. The weekend-retreat experience is usually the best event to help an overinvolved business professional, lawyer, judge, teacher, or retired worker to make a return to more than religious practice. Through the Exercises, the seekers of today meet Christ personally, in His word, His work, His truth, and His life. It is the solid way to discover the social meaning of each one's vocation, even if it takes an individual ten years to surrender to the question, Am I my brother's keeper?

Seeds that were planted by teachers years before in the classroom or by individual counseling finally grow ready for harvesting. The weekend retreat frequently is the place for that first harvest. The Spirit seems to work overtime in bringing the seekers of their God, either known or unknown, to a moment of greater faith during the weekend. This is not just preaching to the saved; rather, it is reaching out to each retreatant's potential really to be holy.

The first call to translate one's life into service is frequently heard in a weekend retreat by so many who have had no time to listen in their heart. This I learned over and over. The action of the Spirit was in the hearts of the participants. The Exercises and my words interpreting them were only the instrument.

This ongoing miracle of providential timing in the lives of retreatants became my ongoing conviction and the first life-long lesson I gained from offering a preached retreat.

Spiritual Exercising

The second lesson learned through the years came from the basic design of the four Weeks. These Weeks of prayer/meditations are really a practical experience of the Paschal mystery. The experience of a dying and a rising emerge through the progress of purifi-

cation to enlightenment, and then to some form of deeper union with God.

Each retreatant has a different call. Ignatius was even willing to dismiss some of his retreatants after the beginning exercises of the First Week. He did, though, send them home with some forms of prayer and examination of conscience. He helped them find God as they were capable. Others, of course, were invited to experience more enlightenment and to search for more generous service in the following Weeks.

Much of the same dynamic works for retreatants who come to attend a weekend retreat. For the most part, they need both the invitation to greater service and help to achieve such dedication. Frequently, this kind of service is first spelled out in the shared experience of a weekend retreat. One-to-one direction comes later. The first awakening experience for most retreatants is the preached retreat. In fact, those whom I have invited to make a personal retreat or those who most frequently have asked for more spiritual direction have been contacted or discovered during an earlier preached retreat.

From these two convictions—that the Spirit truly leads individuals to the specific weekend which they attend, and that, during this encounter with the Paschal mystery expressed by the Exercises of St. Ignatius, they frequently surrender to a deeper conversion of their own—I have learned another approach which has made these weekends a conversion experience for me. The simple truth that turned me around was that Ignatius offered truths for consideration, but he expected these same truths to open up the heart for individual prayer. This was not vocal testimony offered to what happened to me in prayer. That would be more an evangelical prayer service. **I wanted to pray with my retreatants.**

It may seem perfectly obvious from hindsight to say this. The very simplicity of my expressing it can even appear banal. However, for all the possibility that it may be dismissed, I am still convinced that this fresher approach which I have adopted these past

eight or nine years has changed my effectiveness as a director of weekend retreats. Earlier I mentioned the long training and experience of other directed retreats. The undeclared assumption was that each retreat master would offer greater clarity for the Ignatian ideas. Stories and examples abounded, at times even long quotations from skilled authors, the saints, even the Scriptures. All of these presentations simply failed to lead me to the prayer of the heart. Slightly numbed, perhaps, by so much rich intellectuality, after the morning or evening conferences, I went back to my room to fill out the required hour of meditation, and ended simply in the prayer of repose. I know I slept a lot at my desk or kneeler.

The end of the time of meditation came to be the most important moment. This concluding time could actually be the entire amount of time after the input of the retreat director's words. Ignatius called this time a "colloquy," a speaking, a time to be heart-to-heart with Jesus, or His mother, or the apostles. Whatever way the Holy Spirit moved the individual retreatant was good, expected, and desired. This time of colloquy was true prayer.

This may seem so obvious that it was taken for granted. Along with many of my retreat directors, I frequently left time at the end of the conference to the retreatant's own prayerfulness. If I am to be honest, I also may have left some kind of overkill, or even boredom. A short glance at the retreatants who stayed on in chapel after my talk or a cursory glance at the numbers who seemed less engaged in reflection after my conferences gave me pause. Certainly, they may well have been reflecting and not visibly seeming to be in prayer.

Often deeply touching confessions followed later in the day. Grace of conversion was still bestowed, I am sure; but the colloquies I made led me in time to want to share more deeply, even on a preached retreat, my own prayerful reaction to the spiritual truths offered and my experience in prayer regarding them.

This desire and grace came as a transforming approach. My weekend retreats with my groups became an encounter, both indi-

vidual and shared, in finding the presence of God. I found an Ignatian way to share this presence of God both as a common and yet also as a highly individual experience.

Men and women are shaped and formed by so many conflicting pressures that it may seem even more difficult to show that spiritual values demonstrate any relevance today. This is why I have come to appreciate above all a prayerful attitude and a shared experience on a weekend retreat. This weekend should not, of course, be based only on the level of the emotions. Ignatius expects much more. These exercises are designed to call generous souls, even though burdened with heavy secular obligations, to a greater discovery of God Himself in their personal lives.

My task for the weekend, as I see it, is to select various considerations from the Spiritual Exercises and shape them to my groups. This colors the examples and thrust of the development. It allows for a great variety, which keeps my approach fresh and ever evolving. However, I strive to remain faithful to the basic dynamic of the Weeks: a settling in which opens to some purification, leading to enlightenment, more personal familiarity with Christ, and, finally, to a measure of union. All this is offered in the context of a prayerful atmosphere and summarized by a shared Liturgy.

In accomplishing this, I have found recent biblical studies most helpful, especially the insistence by many writers on the value of stories and symbols. Often a single symbol which first had touched me in my own prayer life would serve as a uniting theme. "He is the potter, we are the clay" is one symbol which comes to mind. Other extended stories or themes, such as creation or calling in the desert or the whisper of a gentle breeze, have served simply and directly to open inner meaning for the retreatants and myself. My feeling is that scriptural symbols and stories are well able to nourish a group during prayer time because they are part of the inspirational choice of the Spirit. Using these examples helps me and my retreatants to get closer to the original source and respond more clearly to God's invitation to hear His word.

THE WEEKEND RETREAT

Structure

The weekend retreat has both structure and flexibility. Let me describe one example of a structure which goes from a Friday to a Sunday. It is only an example, but it may be of help. Depending on the group, the number of formal conferences may vary. On an average, there is one introductory meeting/conference on Friday evening. On Saturday morning there are usually two meetings, and in the afternoon some kind of penitential service, with the possibility of another conference followed by the Liturgy.

Usually the retreat director for a preached retreat expects to speak no more than a half hour, possibly thirty-five minutes, and never more than forty. The Liturgy is frequently celebrated by another staff member, who offers the homily. I prefer to share in the Liturgy, because I feel more a part of the retreat community gathered for the weekend. It helps to pray for those most alienated. It also helps to witness to my belief in the presence of Christ in the group.

Saturday evening is often quite varied, either with a shared-faith experience or a more traditional question box or some devotional exercise, such as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with meditative Scripture readings. The rediscovery of the power of Benediction can be an involvement of the total person: sight, smell, sound, body position.

The question box, however traditional it may sound, is an opportunity to come to grips with some current and serious questions by inviting retreatants to propose questions and topics in writing. If the retreat has been spiritually sound, the questions will usually be quite challenging, though respectful in tone. Here, as in other conferences, some of the social questions and obligations the good Christian must face can often for the first time get a more open hearing. For example, Why do bishops write about nuclear arms?

Why do they address the economy? Answers given during retreat can touch very deep-rooted attitudes. On one occasion, I remember, a man who disagreed very much with a moderate, middle-of-the-road position thanked me for not putting him down with the sort of contempt that he said he had received at other times for his far-right convictions. I felt that being respectful to him as a person was the only approach possible, and his gratitude was an opening of grace, able to lead him in time to more moderation.

There are other challenges from a wide spectrum, especially in the matter of sexuality. But if the atmosphere is prayerful and the priest-director is willing to listen to the cry of the heart, usually there will be grace to listen to the Church's teaching, difficult as it may seem, or impossible to follow. The struggle is never purely intellectual. This is why the willingness to be open to God is the first fruit of these exercises, even prior to the prayer experience itself. Hidden miracles of grace frequently occur within the weekend. The retreatant and the director, helped and opened by shared graces in the Exercises, experience the very presence of God.

I write as enthusiastically as I do because the surprises of grace no longer surprise me. God our Lord, as Ignatius writes, will not be outdone in bestowing His graces. The Spiritual Exercises, as long as they stay or become just that—spiritual exercising—will always have divine effect.

The effectiveness of the weekend frequently evidences itself particularly in the confessional. With the current option to meet face-to-face, the opportunities for counseling and subsequent absolution seem much easier for some. However, there is still a need to provide anonymity. Grace is powerful enough to get the reluctant retreatant into the confessional, but not always strong enough to overcome present embarrassment. Anonymity is a choice which can still be respected. Usually, such reconciliations take place around mid-Saturday. However, long experience has taught me that often the most profound confessions come on Sunday morning, or even at the last moment. One needs to be prepared and available on

steps, corridors, sacristy, or garden—anywhere; for the Spirit breathes at will, and usually unexpectedly.

Again on Sunday there will be two conferences in the morning and possibly a healing service; finally, a concluding conference and an expanded Liturgy on Sunday afternoon will bring the retreat to a conclusion. This is a generalized picture for conference retreats on a weekend.

Seven or eight conferences constitute the usual basic weekend-retreat program from Friday evening through part of Sunday. It will often include a healing service and, toward the end of the retreat, an expanded Liturgy. Other exercises of devotion are managed either by the retreat-house staff or the retreatants themselves. Other particular elements might characterize the various retreat centers. Some have shared a scriptural rosary while in procession about the grounds. Some feature either a private or communal stations of the cross. There is other input available through reading opportunities or sometimes through specially selected tapes played during mealtime. I try to fit into whatever structure is offered; and, whenever possible, I share in selecting the readings chosen for the Saturday Liturgy, as well as in discussing ahead of time the selection of the tapes played in the dining room. If I find that there seems to be just too much verbal input all day, I request taped music during meals.

In this format I try to walk with the retreatants in both thought and prayer responses to selected parts of the Exercises. Highly condensed as the experience seems, it produces not only remarkable conversions on a personal level but also, in time, conversions to the social teaching of the Church. The instrument is the dynamic of the Exercises.

Content

To turn now from structure to content, here is an example of a typical weekend lineup, illustrated by one contemporary adaptation. My own practice is to give a new retreat each time with the same basic text. I can best exemplify this by giving a brief outline of a weekend retreat as I preach it and offering my reasons for my choices. It is this wide adaptability that I want to share.

The rhythm of the thirty-day experience is the basis for any adaptation: darkness into light. Whatever helps to move the retreatant through the Paschal mystery of dying and rising is valid spirituality. Even though an individual passage of growth may seem slight, the cumulative effect accomplished by repetition on a yearly basis will produce growth. Any change from selfishness, often recognized for the first time, to unselfishness is the sign of grace. Growing from immaturity to maturity may be painful; but, aided by the support of counseling, acceptance, absolution, and affirmation, the retreatant can make sure progress toward a deeper life in Christ. Going, then, from darkness to light is my first goal after presenting the opening exercises.

I begin with the group as it is, getting a feeling for its general background. Is it working-class or mixed-professional? Are there many non-Catholics present as our guests? What is the average number of retreat experiences? How many are at the retreat for the first time? Once this is established, a few directives are discussed. The Annotations or directives of St. Ignatius, selected according to the needs of the group, offer a good opening. I ask for silence, which respects the work of the Holy Spirit in each person; and I suggest that the retreatants offer this discipline of silence as a possible penance in reparation for sins of speech. I have sometimes suggested as an additional motive for keeping silence the prayer that our national leaders will also learn to listen to moral values and to speak with wisdom in international assemblies.

Then I suggest some Gospel or epistle for spiritual reading, trusting in the power of the Scripture itself to move within the soul.

I ask those who have made over fifteen retreats to read the Gospel of John; those who are in the middle years, Matthew or Luke; and to those who are first-timers or who have never read any Gospel, I recommend Mark. This distribution is not inflexible, nor is it arbitrary. Rather, it acknowledges the differences in the group and underlines my belief that this retreat is always a part of growth in coming to know Christ. I add to this some instruction on how better to read the gospel account, so as always to be willing to stop and savor any word of the Lord that has more meaning.

Finally, I ask for a willingness to give some thought to the matter of the conferences. This, I explain, will be more evident in the conclusion of each session when I will direct a short meditation, a centering into the truth, way, and life of Christ Himself. Thus, from the first encounter of the weekend, the spiritual and interior nature of the Exercises is quietly emphasized. There is no threatening of distant guns being brought up. Fire and brimstone are not waiting to be unleashed. Rather, the journey from darkness to light begins each time the spirit of the Exercises is respected.

The opening conferences seeking the goals of the First Week are oriented toward basic questions. I ask along with each retreatant for a further understanding as to why I was born. What evidence is there in my life that there is meaning reaching beyond the present moment? For myself, I find it helpful to take the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises in very personal terms. What I have found useful and reflective in more modern spiritual trends is to stay with the experience of the individual, rather than to present an abstract ideal of creation as my starting point. Basing my exposition on St. Paul's "I am in agony until Christ be brought to full stature in you," I translate the First Principle and Foundation to say that each of us is created in time and through time to bring Christ to full stature. This really contains the triad of praise, reverence, and service in order to save my soul; but it puts into contemporary biblical words the goal of living, to restore all things in Christ. The individual's part, of course, is to be Christ in that restoration to the fullest of each one's capacity. This always gives rise to concern in

retreatants, especially the more earnest ones. What is such maturity? As expressed in a fuller, complementary masculine/feminine dimension, it is recognized as a much-desired goal. Expanding on this makes excellent material for a first talk, or even for a second one that goes into more detail. But no matter where I am in offering some explanation of Ignatian ideas, I regard it as essential always to end with some kind of shared meditation.

In preface to this shared-meditation part of the exercise, I try to offer some symbol or image, particularly from Scripture, to act as a centering point for the prayer. Scriptural symbols are pregnant with meaning on several levels. I prefer such a scriptural symbol, but from time to time some symbol from nature may be helpful, especially if it is immediately present. At the White House in St. Louis, for example, the symbol of the Mississippi River is very helpful; one can meditate, as it were, on a raft as "Ole Man River"—now the river of life, the retreatant's life—keeps on rolling along! In general, some figure from one's own prayer, often enough from Scripture, such as the image of climbing a mountain or ascending steps or resting in the hollow of Abba's hand, will provide a first and unifying leitmotif throughout the weekend.

The next exercises lead to the darker side of retreatants' relationships with God. Though we are called to maturity in "Christ brought to full stature," the sad reality for all of us is usually a long list of missed opportunities. Sin, personal and crippling, needs to be faced. I give this question in various forms: "While others may have been condemned for less than I have done, why have I not been totally lost?" Answering this question plunges me into the recollection of past mercies and, for the present, the realization that not even my worst rebellion has kept His divine mercy from healing and saving my soul from eternal loss. In the Ignatian view, sin is never considered apart from God's mercy. The concluding personalized prayers in the First Week all emphasize the immediate intimate presence of sustaining forgiveness.

All the considerations on the mystery of sin turn during the Exercises on the present wonder at the forgiving love of God. For me, one of the best opportunities in the First Week to experience this is both to explain and then to share with the retreatants the exercise Ignatius presents at the close of the repetition on personal sins, the exercise he calls the Triple Colloquy.

Briefly, this colloquy calls upon Mary, as our concerned mother, upon Christ, her son in His role of mediator, and, finally, upon God, addressed directly as our Abba, our Father. Each is addressed separately and importuned to confer by intercession or direct gift of the Spirit three life-healing, lifetime graces. These graces may come within three minutes, three hours, or thirty years; when they come, however, they will be no threat or spiritual trauma. I explain that they are graces of profound healing. Sometimes I use nearly the entire conference time to cover the three petitions in preparation for actually using them at the end of the conference or using them during the Liturgy as part of the prayers of the faithful.

Writing about these petitions or even speaking about them may seem mechanical and overly structured. But the experience of praying them for myself with my listeners, those open enough to ask for these graces, has taught me otherwise. Time after time this has been spiritually liberating.

I ask first through our Lady, then again from her Son, and finally of my Father in heaven these gifts of the Spirit: first, to know my own sins, not just as categorical sins, but as personal offenses against God, so that I may more deeply experience personal forgiveness. Second, I ask to know as a grace my burden of sinfulness. I want to know my neurotic hang-ups--a personalized translation--in order that I may start to do something about bringing them under control. I want to begin, with the help of grace, to be healed of my primal faults and hidden compulsions. Finally, I ask to know my values and motivations, mixed as they may be, in order to come to greater honesty in all my choices for God. I want to know what makes me worldly and apart from the divine plan,

lest I do the "right thing for the wrong reason"; I want to make all my choices for God alone.

These are graces which bring the First Week of the Exercises into deeper focus and frequently lead within the weekend retreat to a much more effective experience in the sacrament of reconciliation. The lines outside the confessional move slowly, but no one seems to mind. This prayer of the colloquies is an experience for the retreatants which is deeply moving, and usually opens up opportunities for more enlightenment according to the work of the Second Week of the Exercises.

The conferences which follow late Saturday or Sunday morning are more centered on the humanity of Christ. The call of Christ, with gospel scenes selected to suit the group, make effective ways to meet Jesus in His humanity. For men I choose the camaraderie and slow maturing of the apostles as they hear and answer Christ's call to closer service and love. For women's groups I have a favorite survey of Christ and women in the Gospel. Rapid as these surveys seem to be, the retreatants are soon disposed to begin a search to make the Gospel more personal to themselves.

This, then, leads to further instruction on private prayer. I do not demand much of my groups, allowing them time to discover their individual style of meditation. I do more demanding on a one-to-one basis. Those who want more will find a way to ask. Many an instruction or encouraging word is given as the retreatants move about from chapel to room or out on the grounds. The Spirit breathes where it wills, and frequently in the most unexpected, sometimes humorous, situations.

The "Third and Fourth Week" meditations are usually more condensed in a retreat-weekend experience. I have often read that the graces of the Third Week are graces confirming the election which is made when the full month of the Spiritual Exercises is undertaken. I find, therefore, that identifying some single retreat resolution as "taking up the cross to follow Christ" is the best opportunity to come to grips with the week of Christ's Passion and

Death. To choose to follow Christ more intimately will cost some gift of oneself. To make possible this choice and the grace to persevere in it comes from a union with Jesus in His dying and rising.

This is the element behind my choice for any particular meditation/conference on the Passion. I try to help the retreatants understand prayerfully that their resolutions are a way to share with Christ today His redeeming work, which of necessity will lead, through a kind of dying, to some greater union and, finally, to the life of the Resurrection.

All of this can be summarized in presenting the *Contemplatio*, more simply than is usual. After the preliminary observations on the nature of love, the retreat director can move directly into the dynamic of the *Contemplatio* with a simple approach. Rather than concentrate on the larger common gifts given to all the faithful, even though each such gift is in itself particular, I have learned to bring the focus to more personal intimacy. Rather than view a large bouquet, it is better to study and enjoy a single flower.

I ask the retreatants to look in their own lives for a gift that is unique to each of them, a gift in which the quality and the timing are perfectly harmonized. This will be the gift that they can examine and respond to on the deepest interior level. From many possibilities I give them a personal example which may clarify this approach. This gift that I recall happened to me in Rome several years ago.

I was part of a group returning from the Holy Land after making the Exercises for a month. We stopped in Rome. By mischance, we missed our scheduled audience with the Holy Father. I was disappointed. However, we also had tickets for a general audience. These led to a block of seats in an area fairly close to the papal chair. But the seats in our section were on a first-come, first-choice basis. As we arrived, the group and the others with us fanned out to take seats, all of us hoping for the best view possible. Somehow, I got to the first row; the priest ahead of me unaccountably turned into the second row, which allowed me to get boxed

into the corner seat in front. I did not know at the time that the pope would walk right by this corner as he greeted the pilgrims one by one. So it happened that I was able to meet John Paul II face to face, hand to hand. The section was crowded and others saw him only in general and at a distance. I had the chance for this singular, brief direct encounter. I really would not have wanted anything more. But this was a desire of mine, and it was fulfilled, I feel, as a unique gift from my Lord. This is the gift that I contemplate.

Such a gift, so exquisite in timing and personal value, is worth responding to in the only gift I can return, my own gift of myself, mind and heart, my *Suscipe*. And so examining this gift as an example of the indwelling of my Lord, my response continues to be "Take and receive me." The further examination of the gift recalls an extraordinary lineup of events to bring it about. Why that time? Why that ticket? Why that spot? Why that moment just to give me delight? I am in awe that such a personally small and charming moment came about. I am convinced that my Lord delights in the personalized gift, and He skillfully and delicately uses His power to make me realize our mutual love. Recognizing this in the gift and the gift giving, I came to some realization of how much God must love, and does love. He is love itself. My only response, but a completely grateful one, is the *Suscipe*.

In presenting the final contemplation this way by centering in on a unique gift, I can lead the retreatants to make the same response of love for love. They may choose anything as their gift: the choices are limitless. But in seeing the gift as personal and in exploring it with individual insight, they may more easily make the natural response: gift for gift, love for love. And, to return to my remarks earlier in this essay on the colloquy as the place wherein the fire of a retreat exists, as I have regularly encouraged the retreatants to speak in their own words to the Lord and have exemplified this by sharing with them my own prayer, so I have especially encouraged them to speak personally to the Lord, here and

now, and then daily, after they have left the retreat and gone back to their daily lives. Usually the retreat will end as these themes are both expressed and accomplished in a final Liturgy.

This selection of conferences for such a weekend retreat, condensed as it is, helps to repeat the great themes of the Exercises. By shaping the individual conferences to lead directly, first to some shared prayer and then to additional individual reflection, I feel that I have begun an experience for the majority of my listeners that will in time open them to greater spiritual living.

The search for more direction which is directly spiritual, rather than simply counseling, frequently starts with these first prayerful encounters with the Spiritual Exercises over an extended weekend.

This kind of approach to a weekend retreat has been developing over the past thirty years. There is great variety in the groups which attend and a growing challenge to meet the changes that have moved and shaped our living over the years, so I have never really been bored. Of necessity, I have had to grow with this experience myself. I have been taught much by my retreatants, either those attending for the first time or, often, those coming for spiritual nourishment on a yearly basis. They have sometimes criticized me, constructively for the most part; and they have continually challenged me to make the spiritual life in Christ relevant for today.

Prayer

The last six or seven years of these retreats have been more and more directly prayerful. I would like to offer in conclusion a brief example which may demonstrate how I have been able to shape a conference preaching style to an experience of shared prayer.

After invoking the Spirit upon our time together, I present my conference remarks for about thirty to thirty-five minutes. Most

important, I always conclude those remarks with some guided and shared prayer lasting no more than three or four minutes. Here is where I suggest some symbol as a means to focus the prayers, and I bring it up as a recurring theme several times more during the retreat. An example can show how simple such an approach may be, both for myself as retreat director and, I trust, for those who listen and follow in their hearts.

"Please," I direct, "sit straight in your chairs with your feet flat on the floor. Allow your hands to rest comfortably in your lap in an open position. With your eyes closed or looking at some sacred object here, begin to breathe deeply and slowly. Take your time deliberately to relax." After a moment or so, I begin slowly to lead the retreatants into a receptive attitude for prayer. My intention is to bring the preceding conference into focus for personal prayer.

"As you are breathing slowly, allow yourself to feel the support of the chair down your back; settle into your seat knowing you are completely supported. Then slowly, quietly, by the power of your imagination, allow this chair support to become the hollow of your heavenly Father/Abba's hand. Rest here with the sure knowledge that you are safe in this hollow of His hand . . . From this point of quiet support, remember how many times His mercy has touched you directly . . . your childhood . . . your adolescence . . . your younger adult years . . . Just rest in the memories without questioning His mercy . . . Rest knowing His mercy is with you again at this moment. . . His mercy enfolds you just as you are . . . Breathe deeply and quietly, be grateful . . ."

Each conference ends in some kind of centering prayer such as this. Each conference ends in quiet reflection. Each conference seems directed more deeply by the Spirit who in this moment of prayer created an opportunity to hear the word of God.

Such an approach also allows me to summarize some teaching on daily mental prayer. I do not hesitate to accent even a minimal amount, but I offer it as a daily possibility, and I ask that for as

little as three minutes a day the retreatants think over whichever of the four Gospels they have chosen to read during the weekend retreat. Usually, most of them are willing to give this a try. I count on the action of the Spirit to make them hunger for more. This request does, however, focus on the more generously inclined members of the group. Meditation, even contemplation, after the weekend experience seems less foreign, and a more mature relationship with the Lord appears to them more than a possibility. They discover in their simple reflective praying a way to the treasures of the kingdom of God. They put all things in different perspective; they find themselves renewed; they find Christ true to His promises.

CONCLUSION

In reading "Jesuits Praying," the one-hundredth issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, I found that I identified in some part with practically each writer as he presented his own personal reflections on his own particular way of praying. A common denominator was a shared struggle to find through darkness some light, and eventually to meet Christ. Diverse as the approaches to their prayer seemed at first, the writers repeatedly found a path to God. It was a privilege to share such intimacy; and even more, it was an encouragement to me to continue praying both in the light that breaks in occasionally and, more often, in the dark. Profoundly I felt myself a brother helped by a brother in the Company of Jesus.

I would hope that we could at some time assemble another group of Jesuits who would share on the same level some of the enduring effects from the common experience of making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius year after year. Most of us have experienced several different types of retreats. For example, recently I joined a group in Jerusalem to make the long retreat under individual direction. It was an unusual experience in itself, quite different from the long retreat either in the novitiate or later in tertianship two years after ordination. From my own pilgrim way, I would like

to share with other Jesuits more of our common treasure. We have among ourselves such a large and varied experience of that treasure.

I have written these remarks with the hope that during 1990 and 1991, as we celebrate the founding of the Society of Jesus and the birth of St. Ignatius, some more of my fellow Jesuits might come to see a personal opportunity to preach and share the Exercises with weekend retreatants during one or two weekends a year. This would make even more widespread the gift we now share. It would also be a step on a journey of discovery. Those whom we invite to discover the longer experience of the Exercises, or those whom we feel ready for a Nineteenth-Annotation retreat have usually met the work of St. Ignatius for the first time in a shortened weekend retreat.

Great enterprises, even high sanctity, must begin with small steps. Each of us, schooled by Ignatius, can lead the way to Christ. In praying through the Spiritual Exercises with our retreatants in a weekend of prayer, we may help them (and ourselves) to experience in a growing way the gift of wholeness and holiness for the Church today and tomorrow.

APPENDIX: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Shouldn't the emphasis in presenting the Exercises today be more on directed retreats?

The directed retreat is the ideal. However, it takes time to bring an individual leader in the community to want to spend a week in silence and reflection. Most professionals have hardly any time to attend to spiritual matters. The weekend experience is the best entry into new perspectives. Once a spiritual life-style is under way, the desire for more direction will naturally arise.

Is there much opposition between the work done in spirituality centers and that done in more traditional retreat houses?

The apostolates of these two kinds of establishments are actually complementary to each other. Frequently, the introduction to Ignatian ideas begins with a weekend retreat. Later on, individuals who are searching for still more direction may begin a Nineteenth-Annotation-style retreat in either a retreat house or a spirituality center or wherever they can better get ongoing direction.

In a group retreat, how is it possible to meet so many individual needs?

Just as a teacher tries to shape his presentation to the needs of his class in general while leading its members as individuals one step at a time, so too does the retreat director. A group of retreatants all recognize a basic need for more faith, more trust, and more love of God. By leading the retreatants to Christ in individual, personal prayer, the director gives the individual and his needs to Christ, who will be for him the Way, one step at a time, to even more personal knowledge and love of the Lord.

How do you adapt the general theme to special groups assembled on a weekend?

The group itself often determines the particular thrust of the retreat, although the dynamics remain the same: setting, purification, enlightenment, and union. For instance, some very special groups are those whose members have suffered a recent loss: the grieving, the widowed. Here the pain needs to be directly addressed and shared, especially in the context of the points on the Passion, and definitely those on the Risen Life. For married couples, the examples chosen during the retreat can accent the need for both personal and mutual growth. Helping the couples to talk with each other on specific exercises is a good way to help them through the weekend experience.

A special group which is becoming more common these days are people in some form of twelve-step program, particularly Alcoholics Anonymous. There are several varieties here, too, such as Adult Children of Alcoholics and Al-anon (those who are linked in some way with an alcoholic) or groups dealing with other problems, such as Overeaters Anonymous. A priest doesn't have to have the disease or problem to be accepted and effective with these groups. I have had over twenty-five years' experience in counseling or offering the Exercises to such groups. I find the background to the twelve steps is the meeting ground. Members on retreat are hungry for spiritual instruction, and are extremely grateful whenever at the conclusion of my remarks I lead them in some form of centering prayer. Silence is not a value on these retreats for them as a group. But individual prayer and finding God as their higher power becomes the means of making a retreat full of spiritual attraction.

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SOURCES

Francis Borgia Bids Farewell to His Electors

On July 2, 1565, Francis Borgia was elected by the Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus to succeed Diego Laínez as the Society's third superior general. In his farewell address at the end of the Congregation, saturated with biblical reminiscences, Borgia warned the delegates against carrying over their disagreements during the congregation to their subsequent life in the Society, and pleaded that they treat him with as much consideration as they would their beast of burden while on a journey. The address is here translated by Martin Palmer, S.J., from Borgia's own handwritten copy as transcribed in Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu 34 (1965): 93–95.

The moment has come, reverend Fathers, for each of you to return to his own work and ministry. It is only appropriate that, with the shepherd having been smitten by the sword of responsibility, the sheep also should scatter.

As I see you take your leave and depart, a fear comes over me that, as often enough happens, you may never see my face again nor I yours. For the time of my dissolution is at hand: this my age, my infirmities, my illnesses, and the like all shout aloud.

This thought moves me to recall to your memories a few points which it will perhaps one day be a source of joy to remember. They are four, dealing respectively with God, the neighbor, you, and myself.

As regards the first: you are well aware, Fathers, that those who refused to render up the fruits of the vineyard ended by losing the vineyard itself. In the same way,

anyone who refuses God the fruits of obedience, humility, and patience will lose the vineyard, that is, his own soul. The vineyard will be handed over to other husbandmen, and the kingdom will be taken away from him. Woe to whoever does not give God the things that are God's!

We are not our own; we were bought at a great price. Shall we then not give to God what we have received from him, that is, our very selves—especially since he has given himself entirely to us? What will befall the man who is not God's? A thief's punishment awaits the man who takes back from a king the tribute he previously paid him. Similarly, any religious who in his profession handed over his very self to God, and later takes back the mind which he has given and the will which he has offered, is a thief and a robber.

As regards the neighbor, I would like to say this to you. As you pass by on your journey home, I am sure you will come across countless persons lying on the ground with various ills. Italians and Spaniards sometimes lie overwhelmed by vices and lusts. Germans and French lie by the roadside also, wounded by Luther and Calvin. But you whose duty it is to exercise the Samaritan's charity—do not pass by like the levite and the others. Instead, give these people the oil of mercy and the other remedies they need. By this will everyone know that you belong to the Society, if you labor at healing these ailments.

As regards yourselves, I will say only this. You have witnessed, my brothers, how greatly the works of our God have been magnified in this Society of ours. If they are to be preserved and increased, our humility will also have to increase. If we say, "We will magnify our tongue; our lips are our own—who is Lord over us?" (Ps. 12:5), I fear that our house will be left desolate and the Society's day over. "To God therefore the glory, but to us confusion of our face" (Bar. 1:15).

I shall go further and disclose to you the things that I fear, so that we may be able to say to God, "In your fear we have conceived, etc."

I fear that, unless we consign to oblivion the differences of opinion and the arguments we have occasionally had, these congregations may prove more effective in tearing down than in building up.

I fear that, unless our minds are reined in with bit and bridle as the congregation breaks up, so that they stand firm in blind obedience, we shall all suffer ruin together.

I fear that if even the slightest division, for whatever cause, raises its head among us, then "every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation" (Luke 11:17). What else is the aim of the one who "goes about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8) but to seize any pretext, even that of zeal, to open the door to division so that he can put his sickle into a harvest not his own, that is, into the Society?

I also fear that, if tongue should utter what eye has seen and ear has heard in these matters, they will bring destruction to whoever repeats them, sorrow to whoever hears them, and ruin to whoever reads them.

From all this I conclude that we must begin a new life, destroying the old man and raising up the new, so that the simplicity, obedience, charity, and humility of the primitive Society may be revived in our hearts. Thus will the Society's reputation match its name.

As for myself, my only request is this. I ask to be given the same consideration that people give a beast of burden upon which they have placed a load. Along with their concern for the load, they take special care of the animal, to make sure that it can complete the journey. If it limps, they come to its help. If it slows down, they urge it

on. If it falls, they lift it up. And if it reaches exhaustion, they unload it.

I ask the same for myself. I am your beast of burden, and you have laid the load upon me. At least treat me as you would a beast of burden, so that I may be able to say, "I am become as a beast before you, and I am always with you" (Ps. 73:23).

Lift up your beast by your prayers and supplications. Come to his help—you who have been called to share responsibility for this Society. If he slows down, urge him on with your example and admonition. If you see him exhausted, unload him.

And if you wish to give him help, dearest Fathers, then let me see you all with the same mind, all saying the same thing and having the same opinion. Let there be one

heart, one spirit. Bear each other's burdens, so that I may be able to bear yours. Fulfill my joy, so that our joy may be complete and no one can take it from us.

In order that this plea of mine to you may be fixed forever in your hearts, so that you will always be mindful of the words I have spoken to you, and in order to demonstrate my love for you, I shall now humbly kiss your feet.

I beg almighty God that your feet may be like the feet of hinds, that they may be blessed so that you may proclaim the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.

And I pray that these same feet of yours, once planted upon the high places, may enjoy rest without toil, joy without end. Amen.

R E C E N T B O O K S

Joseph Simons, S. J.

Jesuit Theater Englished

Five Tragedies of Joseph Simons. Edited by Louis J. Oldani, S.J., and Philip C. Fischer, S.J. 1989, 416 pp.

Five plays, performed thousands of times in the Jesuit college theaters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are here for the first time translated in unabridged form. These historical tragedies are important resources in the fields of drama, history, education, religious studies, and social science. Without notable subtlety but with sly humor nevertheless, these school plays at various points satirize greed and cowardice, castigate superstition and skulduggery, portray bluntly arrogant machinations, and hold up for admiration cleverness and courage. Here are fascinating glimpses of how the Jesuit schoolmasters of Europe saw the political, economic, social, and religious milieu of their times. This book is a contribution to the history of education as well as to the history of the theater.

\$34.95 cloth

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Antonio M. de Aldama, S. J.

An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions

Translated by Aloysius J. Owen, S.J. 1989, 319 pp., index

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In a recent letter Father Avery Dulles of Fordham University wrote, "In reading the latest issue of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits I was moved to compose the enclosed comment." In reply, expressing my gratitude for it as editor of Studies, I told him that we would be happy to publish the comment in this section of Studies. I also invited Joseph Bracken to send whatever response he thought appropriate and informed him that we would be equally happy to publish his remarks. He sent in reply "a somewhat revised and shortened version of the letter which I sent to Avery Dulles last week." What follows, then, is the kind of discussion that Studies is happy to stimulate and to make available to its readers.

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Editor:

Joseph A. Bracken's paper, "Jesuit Spirituality from a Process Perspective,"¹ is a thoughtful and stimulating attempt to answer some serious questions raised by Roger Haight's earlier piece, "Foundational Issues in Jesuit Spirituality."² Father Bracken is quite successful, I think, in vindicating the centrality of interiority and prayer in Jesuit spirituality, but the process-ingredient in his response leaves me with the suspicion that he may be proposing a new faith rather than simply a new theology. Inasmuch as Father Bracken felt entitled to respond to Father Haight, he will presumably understand my motivation in expressing my reservations about his own contribution. I do not, however, trust myself to emulate his tact and courtesy. In seeking to be clear and concise, I shall probably give the impression of greater severity than I intend.

Prescinding from the issues raised about judgment, salvation, purgatory, resurrection, and reincarnation, I here limit my comments to

Bracken's doctrine of God as found in the paper just referred to. Can that doctrine be reconciled with the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church, as found in councils since Nicea and First Constantinople? If there are discrepancies, they ought to be seriously pondered before any decision is made to adopt the process approach proposed by Bracken. I see a variety of problems.

The unity of God: Is God's unity that of a family or community rather than that of a single essence or substance? Repudiating "mere 'monotheism'" (pp. 20-21), Bracken speaks constantly of a divine community or a divine society, thus raising suspicions of tritheism. He does not acknowledge any divine substance and reduces the divine essence to "an unbounded field constituted by the ongoing relations of the three divine persons with one another" (p. 34). But the Fourth Lateran Council taught that God is "three persons indeed, but one essence, substance, and nature" (DS 800). The First Vatican Council asserted that God "is one unique

and spiritual substance, entirely simple and unchangeable" (DS 3001). (The term "substance" in these conciliar statements must admittedly be explained as not implying that God stands within a genus or category. As Thomas Aquinas explains, God transcends all the categories including that of substance.³)

The divine simplicity: Bracken asserts that what constitutes the "ongoing corporate self-identity" of God is "the pattern of interrelation among the component parts or members" (p. 10). This sentence seems to suggest that God is a composite and that the three divine persons are component parts of the society that is God. I find this view incompatible with the teaching of Vatican I, following the Fourth Lateran Council, that God is "entirely simple" (DS 800, 3001). It also falls into conflict with the traditional doctrine, affirmed by Lyons II, that "each single person in the Trinity is the one true God, fully and perfectly" (DS 851).

The divine immutability and perfection: Vatican I, after asserting that God is "entirely simple and unchangeable," goes on to teach that he is "perfectly blessed (*beatissimus*) in Himself and from Himself" (DS 3001).⁴ Bracken, on the contrary, holds that the divine persons are dependent not only on one another but also "on all their creatures from moment to moment" (p. 17). He affirms that the three divine persons are involved in an "ongoing process of becoming" (p. 35) and "are continually adding new creaturely experiences to their own communitar-

ian life" (p. 12). Human beings, in his theory, act on God (p. 35). Thus the divine blessedness seems to be variable, capable of increase, and derived, at least partly, from sources outside of God himself.

God as creator: According to Bracken, the Father is creator because he communicates to all creaturely subjects of experience a **possibility** of existence, allowing them freely to actualize themselves (p. 5). I doubt that this fulfills the minimum requirements of the theological concept of creation as set forth, for example, by Vatican I (DS 3025). Bracken, in my estimation, is vulnerable to the criticism that Wolfhart Pannenberg directs against Whitehead: "The idea of the radical self-creation of each actual occasion is the reason why Whitehead's metaphysics cannot be reconciled with the biblical idea of creation or (therefore) with the biblical idea of God."⁵

The Son as uncreated: Still more serious questions are raised when the Whiteheadian doctrine of co-creation is applied to the divine persons themselves. In Bracken's article the origin of the Son is described in the same terms that are used for the production of created realities. "The Father at every instant . . . decides to offer the divine Son a possibility of their joint existence as one God. The Son simultaneously decides to accept this possibility from the Father" (p. 4). "The three divine persons . . . exist in virtue of a self-constituting decision from moment to moment" (p. 34). This seems to imply that the Son is capable of nonexistence, and hence

contingent. The Son appears to be as much a creature as human beings are. If the Father were to withdraw his offer to the Son, or the Son were to withdraw his affirmative response to the Father, the Son would lapse into nothingness.

In the cases of the world and the divine persons alike, Bracken proposes the puzzling thesis that their existence arises through their free acceptance of a divine offer to come into existence. How can an offer be made to, and accepted by, a subject that does not yet exist? Even in the case of temporal simultaneity, the cause must be metaphysically prior to the effect. Nothing can cause itself to be.

Sovereign Lord: In Bracken's opinion "we have in large part misconceived what it means to be divine. That is, we think of God in the singular as the transcendent Lord of heaven and earth to whom all creatures owe obedience and submission" (p. 20). It is ironic that this classical concept of God is dismissed in a paper allegedly devoted to the promotion of Ignatian spirituality. Was it not to the Creator and Lord of all things that Ignatius wished his followers to be totally submissive and obedient? And as for transcendence, is not the triune God of Ignatius, as Erich Przywara put it, the *Deus semper major*? Is not the Ignatian God, in the words of Vatican I, "ineffably exalted above all things that can exist or be conceived besides him" (DS 3001)? The qualitative transcendence ascribed to God does not exclude, but rather requires, God's immanence to his creation—a point that seems to

have eluded most process theologians, who reject God's transcendence in order to protect his immanence.⁶

A final question: If God is depicted as contingent, mutable, and dependent—and thus as having the attributes traditionally associated with creaturehood—one is forced to ask whether God has not been redefined in a way that makes him less than divine. At the very least one must say with Huston Smith that process theology of this kind proposes "a lesser God" than the one it rejects.⁷ As W. Norris Clarke points out, the Whiteheadian concept of God as a kind of demiurge bringing order into the primeval chaos "has turned our metaphysical clocks back not only to a pre-Christian but to a pre-Neoplatonic position, thus cancelling out one of the most decisive metaphysical steps forward in Western thought"—the unacceptability of any dualism not rooted in the prior unity of creative mind.⁸

According to Thomas Kuhn, to whom Bracken appeals for his defense of a paradigm shift, "novelty for its own sake is not a desideratum." Even in science, he states, the new paradigm "must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors."⁹ In theology, I submit, a new paradigm must preserve the teaching of the creeds and councils of the Church, even while refining that teaching and giving it new conceptual and linguistic formulations. The concept of God proposed in Bracken's contribution

seems to me to fail the test of continuity with the Catholic tradition and with the normative teaching of the Church.

Although new paradigms in theology may have their value, they should be framed with care to retain the full content of the faith on which St. Ignatius and so many other saints have built their zeal and devotion. The tragedy of process theology, in the words of Donald Bloesch, is that in their well-meaning attempts to defend the faith these theologians "have emptied the faith of its biblical content and have concocted a God who is other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."¹⁰

Avery Dulles, S.J.
Fordham University

NOTES

¹ *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 22/2 (March 1990).

² *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19/4 (September 1987).

⁴ The International Theological Commission has explained that God's immutability is not to be understood as though he were indifferent to human events and did not cherish the love that human beings have toward him. See the statement "Theology, Christology, Anthropology" (1981) reprinted in *The International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 221-22.

⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 126. For a friendly but very searching critique of the Whiteheadian conception of creation, see W. Norris Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God: A Neo-Thomist Perspective* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University, 1979), especially pp. 66-93.

⁶ According to Thomas G. Winandy, "Process theologians attribute to classical theism the Platonic notion where God is not only other than the finite world, but also apart from it." See his *Does God Change?* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), 128. Earlier in his book Winandy shows that, while this notion of transcendence was operative in the theology of Arius, the Council of Nicea, by proclaiming that the Logos who became incarnate was ontologically and absolutely God, "destroyed any notion of transcendence which understood God to be isolated from creation" (p. 16).

⁷ Huston Smith, "Has Process Theology Dismantled Classical Theism?" *Theology Digest* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 303-18, esp. pp. 315-16.

⁸ W. Norris Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, pp. 72-73.

⁹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 169.

¹⁰ Donald G. Bloesch, "Process Theology in Reformed Perspective," *Listening* 14 (1979): 185-95; quotation from p. 194.

Reply to the above letter:

Dear Avery,

Thank you for your letter of April 18 and thought-provoking

comments on my article in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*. I am flattered by the attention which you

have paid to my work. I only hope that other Jesuits in the Assistancy will devote to the reading of the article even a small portion of the time and energy which you obviously gave to it. The following remarks are intended to be only an informal reply to the points raised in your letter. A complete response would demand far more time and reflection than is available to me at present.

In your first paragraph, you suggest that I may be proposing a new faith rather than simply a new theology. This is certainly a serious charge which I must consider carefully so as to avoid even the suspicion of heresy. On the other hand, the issue is complicated by the fact that virtually every expression of the faith beyond the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is shaped by an implicit theology and philosophy. As I see it, all the conciliar statements which you cite in your letter bear the imprint of an underlying world view: Stoicism or Neoplatonism in some cases, Aristotelianism in others. These philosophical presuppositions do not thereby render the faith statement false, but they condition what the reader understands by certain key words, such as the unity of the divine being, its simplicity, immutability, etc. Given another world view such as I have proposed in my writings, the words remain but their meaning is inevitably somewhat altered. Immutability, for example, within an Aristotelian context means that within God there is no change whatsoever since change in any form is an imperfection. Within a

process-relational understanding of reality, however, divine immutability is seen as the unvarying character of the relationships of the three divine persons to one another and to all their creatures. Their fidelity and commitment to each other and their creatures is thus what is meant by immutability in this new, more strongly interpersonal context.

In any event, while writing the *Studies* article and, even more so, in composing *The Triune Symbol*, my systematic theology, I was careful to adjust the philosophical presuppositions of Whitehead's thought to the truths of the faith and not vice versa. One of my sharpest critics among orthodox Whiteheadians, Lewis Ford, has pointed that out to me repeatedly: I am not a Whiteheadian in the conventional sense. I have altered, for example, the Whiteheadian category of society so as to accommodate Christian belief in God as triune. Likewise, I changed the notion of the divine initial aim so that it not only provides directionality for the concrescence of the finite actual occasion but also empowers it to be, equivalently creates it in its radical subjectivity. I have done this for two reasons. First and most importantly, Christian revelation represents a higher truth than the metaphysical scheme of even a highly creative thinker like Whitehead. Thus, in a conflict between the two, the metaphysical scheme must yield to the divinely revealed truth. Secondly, if truth is ultimately one, the revealed truth represents a dimension of reality which the original thinker

should have incorporated into his scheme but overlooked.

Thus, in working out the further implications of the Whiteheadian doctrine of societies, I have not only justified belief in the Trinity within a Whiteheadian world view but shed new light on a hitherto undeveloped feature of Whitehead's thought. Likewise, in my revised understanding of divine initial aims within Whitehead's philosophy, I think that I have come up with a suitable compromise between the classical understanding of creation and the Whiteheadian notion of Creativity which, as you and Panenberg point out, effectively eliminates any notion of God as Creator. But, over and above that, I think my understanding of divine initial aims unexpectedly offers a way out of the classical impasse between Jesuits and Dominicans on the respective roles of divine prevenient grace and human freedom in the economy of salvation. That is, at any given moment a human being cannot make a decision without divine prevenient grace in the form of a divine initial aim; yet in the final analysis the decision is the human being's, not God's. As I see it, this is still another instance of the potential fruitfulness of an encounter between a new philosophical conceptuality and the traditional truths of the Christian faith.

If time permits, I would recommend that you page through *The Triune Symbol* and see how it does take account of the basic belief system of the Church. Likewise, most of the reviews of the book note the "conserving" character of

my approach (cf., e.g., Catherine LaCugna's review in the April 1987 issue of *Religious Studies Review* and John O'Donnell's review in the fall 1989 issue of *Heythrop Journal*). Finally, you might take a look at an article which I wrote for *Theological Studies* in 1985 entitled "The Two Process Theologies: A Reappraisal." Therein, I try to place Whitehead's thought in the context of the history of Western philosophy. Perhaps this will help you understand why for me this shift in paradigm for the understanding of the faith is no mere novelty, but something required to keep the truths of the faith alive and well in the minds and hearts of intelligent contemporary Christians.

In that same line, I might add that in recent years theologians writing on the Trinity have tended to use a communitarian model for the understanding of the doctrine (cf. here John O'Donnell's recent book, *The Mystery of the Triune God* [Paulist Press, 1989]). I attribute this, not to the persuasiveness of my own arguments in that direction, but rather to the felt need that writers on the Trinity have of integrating the doctrine into the faith lives of their readers. Similarly, many writers besides O'Donnell propose that the three divine persons are affected by what happens in creation. In most cases, of course, the attempt is made somehow to incorporate these new insights into the older Thomistic framework for the understanding of God. Norris Clarke, for example, offers a distinction between God's relational consciousness and the divine inner

being or perfection in his book *The Philosophical Approach to God* (Winston-Salem, NC, 1979). In virtue of the former, God is deeply affected by the response of creatures to divine grace. My proposal is rather to adopt a new paradigm altogether than to tinker with an older one. The new paradigm, however, is not orthodox Whiteheadianism but a creative adaptation of Whitehead's thought to the presuppositions of Christian belief, as I made clear in responding to Clarke some years ago in an article for *Concilium*, 171 (1984).

Perhaps one final word should be said about my hypothesis that the nature of God is an intentional field for the interrelated activity of the three divine persons. One may object that a field is a rather strange conception of the divine nature. But this is because one has implicitly accepted the Aristotelian presupposition that Being is to be defined in terms of individual entities. That is, if in the end only individual entities exist, fields as the context for their dynamic interrelation are relatively unimportant since they do not af-

fect the essence or nature of the entities in question. On the other hand, within a process-relational world view where the components (actual occasions) within the field are constantly changing, the field is all-important since the field alone survives the passage of time so as to condition the emergence of new components (actual occasions). Thus, within a process-relational world view, fields are the equivalent of substances within Aristotelian metaphysics. It is then altogether fitting that the divine nature be conceived as an all-comprehensive field of activity for the three divine persons and all their creatures.

For an informal reply to your letter, I seem to have written at some length. Perhaps it would be best to conclude at this point with my thanks, once again, for the time and energy which you devoted to the study of my article. With all best wishes for the end of the semester, I remain

Yours very sincerely,
Joseph A. Bracken, S.J.
Xavier University

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